



***Substitute House Bill No. 5416***

***Public Act No. 16-68***

***AN ACT CONCERNING THE LABOR DEPARTMENT AND CERTAIN PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS, IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE TO VETERANS BY THE ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE UNIT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND STRENGTHENING COORDINATION BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND MUNICIPALITIES.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2016*) The Labor Commissioner shall establish a Special Operations Resource Network to serve as a clearinghouse for veterans and members of the armed forces and National Guard who have acquired, as part of their military training, knowledge, experience or a set of skills most compatible with certain professional opportunities. The Labor Commissioner, in consultation with the Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs and the Adjutant General, shall develop a database in which such veterans and members are categorized based on the types of military training received and cross-referenced against certain professional opportunities for purposes of pairing any such veteran or member with any such professional opportunity. Any veteran or member of the armed forces or National Guard may apply for inclusion in such database by submitting (1) evidence of the military training received by such veteran or member describing the particular knowledge, experience or set of skills acquired, and (2) if such applicant is a veteran, such veteran's military

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discharge document or a certified copy thereof. The Labor Commissioner shall evaluate any such application, include such veteran or member in such database, and so categorize such veteran or member as described in this section. The Labor Commissioner shall update such database weekly and shall publish such database on the Labor Department's Internet web site. Any person interested in hiring any such veteran or member included in such database shall contact the department through a dedicated telephone number and the department shall facilitate contact between such person and such veteran or member. For the purposes of this section, (A) "veteran" means any person who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable from active service in the armed forces, (B) "armed forces" has the same meaning as provided in section 27-103 of the general statutes, and (C) "military discharge document" has the same meaning as provided in section 1-219 of the general statutes.

Sec. 2. Subsections (b) and (c) of section 27-102~~l~~ of the 2016 supplement to the general statutes are repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

(b) ~~(1)~~ The commissioner may appoint a unit head to administer a veterans' advocacy and assistance unit for the aid and benefit of veterans [.] and their spouses, [and] eligible dependents and family members. [Such unit shall conduct an annual training course for any city or town employee designated a veterans' service contact person pursuant to subsection (b) of section 27-135.] The unit shall have a staff of not less than eight men and women, including six service officers, and clerical personnel. The unit head and the service officers shall be veterans, as defined in section 27-103, or veterans who were awarded the armed forces expeditionary medal for service by the armed forces. At least one of the service officers shall be a woman having a demonstrated interest in the concerns of women veterans, who shall be responsible for addressing those concerns, and, effective upon the next

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opening of a service officer position occurring on or after July 1, 2010, at least two of the service officers shall be individuals having bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish, within existing authorized positions. Each service officer shall successfully complete a course in veterans' benefits within one year of commencement of employment and shall be assigned to one of the five congressional districts of the state.

(2) The unit staff shall, at least twice annually, conduct a training course for any city or town employee designated a veterans' service contact person pursuant to subsection (b) of section 27-135, as amended by this act. The unit staff shall include in such training course a summary of state and federal services and benefits, the duties to be carried out by each veterans' service contact person, as described in subsection (a) of section 27-135, as amended by this act, and any assistance the unit staff may provide to any veterans' service contact person related to such duties.

(3) (A) The veterans' advocacy and assistance unit shall develop a written outreach plan identifying (i) strategies for conducting outreach to veterans and their spouses, eligible dependents and family members for purposes of providing assistance in claims for veterans' services or benefits, and (ii) to the extent possible, specific events and other opportunities to provide such assistance that are sponsored by the unit or in which the unit is participating. The unit shall update such written outreach plan as necessary to improve the efficacy of its outreach efforts.

(B) The unit head and each service officer shall electronically track information relating to outreach conducted or attended by the unit, including, but not limited to, the title or type of any outreach event conducted or attended and the number of veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members to whom substantive services or referrals were provided.

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(C) The unit shall utilize the notifications received from the administrator of each nursing home and assisted living facility in the state, pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section, to develop an annual schedule for each service officer to visit nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The unit shall compile any information collected as a result of such visits and provide quarterly reports on such information to the Board of Trustees for the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

(D) The unit shall provide quarterly reports to the Board of Trustees for the Department of Veterans' Affairs on (i) concerns raised by veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members, which concerns shall be summarized by type, frequency and resolution, (ii) petitions filed by veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members received by the commissioner under section 27-102(d)-54 of the regulations of Connecticut state agencies for the four preceding months, and (iii) copies of any such petitions.

(c) In addition to the powers and duties prescribed under section 4-8, the commissioner shall have the following powers and duties:

(1) To prepare studies and collect information concerning facilities and services available to members of the armed forces [.] or veterans [, their] or the spouses or eligible dependents of such members or veterans, including facilities and services for veterans who may have been exposed to a Vietnam herbicide during their periods of military service;

(2) To [conduct interviews in the nursing homes or hospitals throughout the state to determine the number of veterans admitted and ascertaining which benefits such veterans are currently receiving and are entitled to receive] require that the administrator of each nursing home and assisted living facility in the state notify the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit not later than April 1, 2017, and

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every six months thereafter, of any new resident in such nursing home or assisted living facility who is a veteran or a spouse, eligible dependent or family member of a veteran, provided each such nursing home or assisted living facility shall not release the identity of any such new resident to the unit without the consent of the new resident. As used in this subdivision, "new resident" means a resident of whom such nursing home or assisted living facility has not previously notified the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit;

(3) To cooperate with service agencies and organizations throughout the state in disseminating and furnishing counsel and assistance of benefit to residents of this state who are or have been members of the armed forces [.] or their spouses or eligible dependents, which will indicate the availability of: (A) Educational training and retraining facilities; (B) health, medical, rehabilitation and housing services and facilities; (C) employment and reemployment services; (D) provisions of federal, state and local laws affording financial rights, privileges and benefits; and (E) other matters of similar nature;

(4) To assist veterans [.] and their spouses, [and] eligible dependents and family members in the preparation, presentation, proof and establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits accruing to them under federal, state and local laws;

(5) To cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and private agencies securing or offering services or any benefits to veterans [.] or their spouses or eligible dependents;

(6) To develop and prepare a long-range plan and mission statement for the Veterans' Home and the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit;

(7) To review all appeals made by veterans [.] or their spouses, [or] eligible dependents or family members and render the final decision

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thereon regarding the denial of admission to any program or the refusal to render any service or benefit which is administered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the discharge or transfer from any such program or any disciplinary action taken while participating in any such program; and

(8) If the Veterans' Home closes or ceases to provide housing to veterans, to provide or arrange for housing to any veteran residing at the home or the health care facility within the home on the date of such closure or on the date the Veterans' Home ceases to provide housing to veterans.

Sec. 3. Section 27-135 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

(a) Any city or town, either separately or with one or more other cities and towns, may, by ordinance, establish a local veterans' advisory committee which shall have the responsibility of carrying out locally the duties and purposes of this section and, within their charter powers and as otherwise provided by law, may make available to such local committees the necessary funds to carry out their duties and responsibilities. The committee may (1) act as the coordinating agency in all matters concerning veterans and their dependents, coordinating the activities of public and private facilities concerned with veterans' reemployment, education, rehabilitation and adjustment to peacetime living; (2) cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and private agencies in securing services and benefits to which a veteran or his dependents may be entitled; (3) use the services and facilities of the veterans organizations so far as possible to carry out the purposes of this section; and (4) encourage and coordinate vocational training services for veterans.

(b) (1) Any city or town that [(1)] has not established its own local veterans' advisory committee separate from one or more other cities or

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towns pursuant to subsection (a) of this section [, and (2)] and does not otherwise provide funding for a veterans' service officer shall designate a city or town employee to serve as a veterans' service contact person in such city or town. The Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs shall annually send to the chief executive officer of any such city or town an electronic notification of such chief executive officer's duty to so designate a city or town employee in accordance with this subsection. Such chief executive officer shall, not later than thirty days after receipt of such notification, submit to the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit, as described in subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act, the name and electronic mail address of the city or town employee so designated. As used in this subdivision, "chief executive officer" means the officer described in section 7-193.

(2) Any city or town employee designated as a veterans' service contact person shall carry out the duties described in subsection (a) of this section and [may complete an annual] shall complete a training course conducted by the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit, as described in subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act. Each employee so designated prior to July 1, 2016, shall complete such training course prior to January 1, 2017. Each employee so designated on or after July 1, 2016, shall complete such training course not later than one year after the date of such designation. Upon completion of such training course, a veterans' service contact person may thereafter receive electronically any new or updated training information from the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit and shall not be required to complete any other such training course.

Approved June 2, 2016